

The water's fine so let's go fishing!



By Jeff Ledermann, angler and hunter education and skills team supervisor

So you might have heard that fishing is a big deal in Minnesota. Maybe you've even thought it sounds kind of fun. Then reality sets in and here comes the list of chores, hassles and other plans – all those reasons we end up watching beautiful vistas through our friends' social media feeds instead of enjoying Minnesota's great outdoors ourselves.

Well I'm here to tell you that you can fish, and I'm here to stoke your fear of missing out. That's right, chores and other plans will always be there. But not the fishing.

No, it's not mandatory that you fish. Nobody is forcing you to get out and see beauty in Minnesota so strik-

ing that it takes your breath away – lakes, streams, rocks and forests that are better in person despite any after-the-fact social media filter. That loon that swims by won't notify you when it's going to do that again. The turtle may continue to sit on a nearby log, but then how would you know? And then there's you – how do you know what your problems will look like with the perspective you gain in a day of relaxing on the water with some peace and quiet?

The paradox is that fishing is about more than catching fish. And for people who do catch fish, many find it's all they think about this time of year.

Out of the 1.4 million licensed anglers in Minnesota, about half a million take part in the great annual tra-

dition of fishing opener, this year on Saturday, May 12. Of course, "fishing opener" is a bit of a misnomer since fishing remains open all year for many species including popular and fast-biting species like bluegill or crappies.

Fishing opener marks the day fishing can begin for walleye, northern pike and trout in lakes. But it's more than that. For many, fishing opener is a time to be with family and friends, reminiscing on old memories and making new ones. For others, fishing opener is the first chance to feel that tug on the line and the excitement and anticipation to see what is on the other end. That first fish fry is the hope for some who aim to bring home a healthy and tasty meal of fish they catch and prepare themselves.

You can even pat yourself on the back for fishing. It's good for Minnesota. Fishing supports local businesses and rural economies. And purchasing licenses, fishing equipment and boat fuel supports conservation. That's because license sales and federal excise taxes on fishing equipment and boat fuel fund the majority of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' basic fish management and fishing programs that help continue great fishing for future generations.

I hope you don't miss out on great fishing during the opener or sometime this summer, and make some new memories with old and new friends. If you want to start fishing, I encourage you to ask someone who does if they'll take you along.

Flash Baked Walleye Fillets

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons clarified butter, melted
- 4 (4 ounce) fillets walleye fillets, cut into pieces
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil

Directions

Preheat an oven to 500 degrees F (260 degrees C).

Pour the melted butter into a 9x13-inch baking dish. Place the fillets into the butter, skin-side-down. Sprinkle evenly with lemon pepper and basil.

Bake in the preheated oven until the fish is opaque and easily flakes with a fork, 5 to 7 minutes.





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Walleye – gold standard of fresh water game fish

The largest member of the perch family, *Sander vitreus*, has a dedicated angling following throughout most of the eastern United States and Canada.

The walleye is the state fish of Minnesota and South

Dakota and the official fish of Saskatchewan, but it's a popular table fish across its entire range. Native to major river drainages in the Upper Midwest and large, wind-swept lakes, the walleye is a true freshwater creature.

It does not survive in salt or brackish water. Walleyes in northern states average one to two pounds, but individuals can exceed 10 pounds. Close relatives to the walleye include the yellow perch, sauger, and European zander.

Don't lip a walleye like you would a bass! These sharp-toothed predators can feed aggressively, especially in the late spring after recovering from their post-ice-out spawn. Small perch and other minnows, as well as insects, provide the bulk of a walleye's diet, and its unique vision gives it an advantage over prey during low-light periods.

Prime hours for catching walleyes often coincide with dawn or dusk, at night during the species' nocturnal feeding binges, or even during the day when a windy "walleye chop" creates turbid, low-visibility underwater conditions.

Walleyes are active much of the year, thus providing great ice-angling for the species. Anglers often use live minnows or lures that mimic small fish to catch walleyes.

Stocked around the country (and beyond), the walleye offers thick, white fillets, making it arguably the most pursued species for fish fries.

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